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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 001159

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STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV  
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/08/2012

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#) [NLD](#)

SUBJECT: NLD "UNCLES" APPRECIATE CONTINUED U.S. SUPPORT

REF: A. RANGOON 1147

[1](#)B. RANGOON 1060

[1](#)C. RANGOON 1018

Classified By: COM CARMEN M. MARTINEZ FOR REASON 1.5(D).

[1](#)1. (C) National League for Democracy Central Executive Committee members ("the uncles") told Chief of Mission on September 9 that they appreciate continued U.S. support for their party and encourage increased pressure on the regime for democratic change. COM Martinez agreed with the uncles that the regime may be backing away from political reconciliation at this time, but also noted that it was illogical to do so with the EU troika in Rangoon and the UN General Assembly about to convene. She assured them of continued U.S. pressure for democratic reform but cautioned that the threat of a trade ban would be more effective than actually imposing the ban. The uncles also mentioned that Aung San Suu Kyi has not met with Secretary One - Lt. General Khin Nyunt or Senior General Than Shwe since her release from house detention on May 6. End Summary

Uncles Thank U.S. For Continued Support; Request More Pressure

[1](#)2. (C) At an introductory meeting with Chief of Mission Carmen Martinez on September 9, NLD Chairman U Aung Shwe, Vice Chairman U Tin Oo, Secretary U Lwin, and Central Executive Committee member U Nyunt Wei (the uncles) said they appreciated continued U.S. support for their efforts to move the regime toward democratic reform. For instance, they said, they were "very pleased, very happy" that the U.S. had expressed concern over the recent arrest and sentencing of two NLD members for possessing a banned publication. (Note: They said they heard this on a short-wave radio broadcast. End Note.) COM Martinez asked how the uncles interpreted the regime's latest series of actions. She noted that the regime has had several opportunities recently to do simple things - releasing political prisoners, investigating Shan rape cases, not arresting NLD members and students protesters - that would have helped mute international criticism. Instead the regime appears to have decided to assert control just as the EU troika is in Rangoon, the UN resolution on Burma is being formulated, and the UN General Assembly is about to convene. Chairman U Aung Shwe summed up his assessment of the regime's backward shift by saying "they just don't want to talk to us."

[1](#)3. (C) The uncles said the only way the regime would continue moving forward on reforms would be in response to continued pressure from the U.S. and others. They said that the recent lack of action by the regime after the relatively positive atmosphere during the Razali visit was an indication that the "carrots" some in the international community have been using to encourage reform do not have the desired effect. The regime will accept the carrots but allow change "on their own schedule," which is far too slow. CEC member U Nyunt Wei asked if the U.S. was still considering a trade ban on Burma, noting that this might bring about change. Asked if it would not also hurt the poor by decreasing employment, he said it would hit the business people closest to the regime most and they would, in turn, put pressure for reform on the generals. COM Martinez said she would pass this view on, but noted that the threat of a trade ban would probably be more effective pressure than implementing the ban. She reasoned that the economic effects of the ban would be minimal and the generals would use the ban as an excuse for their poor state of the economy (Note: As they currently do with the investment ban. End Note).

Party Offices, Newspaper, Legal Actions for Prisoners

[1](#)4. (C) Secretary U Lwin said the NLD is ready to open NLD offices nationwide, except for Kayah State, whenever it gets agreement with the SPDC. There are no NLD leaders available to staff an office in Kayah State; the State Chairman was recently released from prison but he is old and bedridden due to a stroke. Regarding the publication of an NLD newspaper, the uncles said the NLD has applied to the Ministry of Home Affairs for permission to publish the paper but, "like so many things," it is "under consideration at higher levels." Regarding the release last week of eight political prisoners, the uncles said that most of those released had served most

of their sentences when they were released. One, they noted, was not an NLD member but a 70-year-old woman arrested in 1996 or 1997 for operating a copier machine to duplicate political materials. Only two of those released were NLD members; others were only supporters of the party.

15. (C) Vice Chairman U Tin Oo said the NLD would attempt to provide legal assistance to the two students arrested for a political protest at city hall on August 18 (refs a and b). The NLD is working with a local lawyer, U Kyi Win, to find out when and where the students' trial will be held and to provide them legal counsel. The NLD has been in touch with the families of the two students but, so far, the government has not notified the families of the trial date. U Tin Oo said the NLD's strategy is to force the trial into the public realm so the process is at least somewhat transparent. Otherwise, he noted, the sentence will just be announced and the two will go to prison with no due process.

16. (C) Adding to the mystery of whether ASSK has met with senior level officials since her release on May 6, the uncles stated, contrary to what ASSK herself indicated (see ref c, para. 4), that she has not met with Secretary One Lt. General Khin Nyunt or Senior General Than Shwe.

Comment

17. (C) The uncles' call for increased international pressure is a familiar refrain, but questions remain as to how involved they actually are in the negotiations with the SPDC. Aung San Suu Kyi has held these negotiations very close to her chest and even her closest advisors may have little idea of what progress is or is not being made.

Martinez